

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

Property Address:	1914 S Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Dupont Circle Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
ANC:	2B	<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Concept Review
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Permit
Meeting Date:	September 22, 2011	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#11-320	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, owner Al McDonald, seeks approval of a permit application to demolish the wood frame structure at the rear of 1914 S Street NW in the Dupont Circle Historic District.

Property Description and Context

The building lot at 1914 S Street NW consists of two primary structures built at two different times. The structure that is the subject of the permit application is a two-story wood frame structure at the middle of the lot that was built circa 1870 (based on map research and analysis of construction method). A newer two-story brick rowhouse at the front of the lot was built in 1896 (based on permit records). The two structures are narrowly separated and only connected by a five foot wide hyphen.

The frame structure dates to the earliest period of development in the Dupont Circle Historic District. At the time of its construction, the area was dominated by undeveloped parcels, unimproved rights-of-way, and uses like cemeteries which were typically sited on the periphery of the 19th-century city. Although this would make the structure one of the oldest extant structures in the historic district, until the applicant submitted a permit application for demolition, the structure was unknown to the Historic Preservation Office. Survey and nomination documents relating to the designation of the Dupont Circle Historic District only make one mention of three 19th-century wood frame structures but do not evaluate their significance. 1914 S Street was not mentioned, likely because the structure is largely obscured from public view by the 1896 brick rowhouse in front of it.

The frame structure is two-stories in height, with a side-gable, standing-seam metal roof, and clad with wide board siding. There is evidence of full-width porches at the front and rear, but neither porch remains today.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to demolish the wood frame structure. A restoration of the brick structure is underway. No plans have been submitted for an addition or any other type of construction in the space now occupied by the frame structure.

Evaluation and Recommendation

There are two standards for evaluating and approving the demolition of buildings and structures in a historic district. Demolition of a *contributing* building requires review and approval by the Mayor's Agent and within a very limited set of parameters. On the other hand, demolition of a

non-contributing building is a category of work delegated to Staff.¹ Therefore, the primary question relative to the demolition of the frame structure is its contributing status.

The most relevant regulatory consideration that should be made when determining whether a property meets the definition of non-contributing structure is:

“A building or structure does not add to a district’s sense of time and place and historical development if its qualities of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association have been so altered or are so deteriorated that the integrity of the property is irretrievably lost.”²

Staff has conducted two thorough site visits to inspect the structural integrity of the building and determine if it has deteriorated to the point of being irretrievably lost. Behind intact wood siding, structural deficiencies are immediately evident. Most noticeable on the interior of the structure is a severe and exaggerated tilt in the entire structure from front to back. This is indicative of failure of the building’s foundation that has allowed the building to settle or shift off its foundation. Further inspection at the base of the building shows displacement of the framing from the foundation and extensive rot at all sill plates between the foundation and wall studs. Additional complete decomposition has taken place in the studs across the front of the structure up to a height of three feet above the sill. Three of the four corner posts are extensively decomposed at their base. All floor joists at the ground level have been in close contact with the soil, the resulting dark and damp conditions have resulted in severe decomposition in all joists and even complete disintegration of the joists in the middle of the floor plate.

The building has lost nearly all structural integrity. Restoration would require replacement of all pieces of the foundation, sill plates, studs and joists, with only the original roof trusses of sufficient condition worthy of retention. Replacement of that amount of framing would require demolition of the intact original lathe and plaster walls, further eroding the authenticity of the structure. The end result would be a near total replacement of all components with a modern replica.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board certify the wood frame structure at 1914 S Street NW as a non-contributing building, based on a lack of structural integrity. HPO further recommends that final permit approval for demolition be delegated to staff.

¹ District of Columbia Municipal Regulations: Historic Preservation, DCMR 10A, Sect. 320.1(c).

² DCMR 10A, Sect. 703.1(a)